

LYDFORD RAILWAY PONDS [PRIVATE]

1997-2006: Probable Priority Site of National Importance

CURRENT STATUS UNCERTAIN

Flooded disused railway lines and station, adjacent to a Dartmoor moorland mire. Possible breeding population of Small Red Damselfly and abundant Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly, but neither seen since 2006. Habitat deteriorated and dragonfly interest apparently lost by 2008.

Last updated: 18/03/2025

Site: LYDFORD RAILWAY PONDS	1987-1996			1997-2006			2007-2016			2017-2026		
Grid ref.: SX500826	Breeding		Other	Breeding		Other	Breeding		Other	Breeding		Other
	Succ	Poss		Succ	Poss		Succ	Poss		Succ	Poss	
<u>Damselflies</u>												
Beautiful Demoiselle			A			B			B			
Banded Demoiselle												
Emerald Damselfly	A		C			D						
<u>White-legged Damselfly</u>												
Large Red Damselfly	B	B	D	B	B	C						
Blue-tailed Damselfly		B	C			B			B			
<u>Scarce Blue-t Damselfly</u>	A	B	D			C						
Common Blue Damselfly	B		D			B			A			
<u>Southern Damselfly</u>												
Azure Damselfly	A	B	E	A	C	E			C			
<u>Red-eyed Damselfly</u>												
Small Red-eyed Damselfly												
<u>Small Red Damselfly</u>	A		D		A	C						
<u>Dragonflies</u>												
<u>Hairy Dragonfly</u>												
Common Hawker			B	A		A						
<u>Norfolk Hawker</u>												
Brown Hawker												
Southern Hawker				B		A						
Migrant Hawker												
Emperor Dragonfly				A		B						
Lesser Emperor												
Vagrant Emperor												
Golden-ringed Dragonfly			B	A		B						
<u>Downy Emerald</u>												
Broad-bodied Chaser	B		B			A						
<u>Scarce Chaser</u>												
Four-spotted Chaser			A			B						
Keeled Skimmer	C	B	D	+	+	D			B			
Black-tailed Skimmer												
Common Darter	C		C	B	A	B			B			
Red-veined Darter												
<u>Ruddy Darter</u>												
Black Darter	B		B									
Yellow-winged Darter												
Scarlet Darter												
Total species in category:	10	5	15	8	5	16	0	0	6			

Bold underlined = nationally important species **Bold black = important species**

Succ = Successful breeding (exuvia(e) and/or larva(e) and/or pre-flight emergent and/or oviposition);

Poss = Possible breeding (copulating pair); Other = Adult(s) or unspecified.

Abundance codes: A=1; B=2-5; C=6-20; D=21-100; E=101-500; F=>500; + = no count.

Key Species History

Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly – “very good numbers” in late 1970’s-early 1980’s; 30 (including two pairs *in cop*) on 30/6/88; 30 on 10/6/89; only six on 4/7/93 (when favoured area to ENE of the old station platform had become more overgrown, with little open water); and C (6-20) in 1995. 7 (6 males) caught and marked by team of 3 on 14/7/06 is the only record since 1995.

Small Red Damselfly – a few were noted in 1978-9 and 1991; 85 on 4/7/93, 70 of which were WSW of the old station; maximum in 1995 of only three on 24/6/95. Up to 8 (1 pair *in cop.*) counted in July 2005, all at the large pond (sub-site 17) and C (copulation observed) on 14/7/06. None seen on 29/6/08.

Other species of note:

Common Hawker – 1 egg-laying on 21/8/01.

Keeled Skimmer – 25 on 30/6/88; ten in 1993 and 1995.

Habitat (from 2005/6 survey)

An old, flooded railway line and station abandoned in the 1960’s, which developed into a fine wildlife site, with a mosaic of different habitats and communities (target notes refer to map):

1. Dryish semi-improved pasture with damper areas along parts of old trackway. In 2005, very little damp ground.
2. Drain with deep (to 0.75m) vertical sides, water 0.3m deep, fast flow, silty/algae bottom.
3. Wet grassland with lots of scrub (therefore shady in places) with some very wet patches with *Typha*, *Juncus effusus*, *J. bulbosus*, *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and small areas of open water. pH: 7.3 (19/4/93). By 2005: much scrub cleared, damp in places though no open water.
4. The old platform area. The platform is raised and dry and succeeding to short ‘grassland’ plus a little scrub. The north-western track is totally scrubbed over with youngish willows, but remains damp with shady moss, *Sphagnum* and *Carex* ground flora. The southeast track also has a lot of young scrub, but a few areas remain open and support pools with *Typha*, *Sphagnum*, *Potamogeton*, *J. effusus*, but little open water at the time of 1995 survey. Tall scrub thinned during 2004/5 winter, though tracks completely overgrown and no open water.
5. Patch in corner similar to 3. By 2005, no longer distinct.
6. Rough semi-improved ‘grassland’, with bare ground, ‘weeds’ and gorse scrub.
7. Three temporary pools with *J. effusus* and *Sphagnum* or *J. bulbosus* among 8. Unimproved acid grassland with bracken, gorse and *Succisa*. In 2005, only one pool with open water (easternmost?), with *Juncus bulbosus*, *J. effusus*, *Glyceria fluitans*, *Lythrum portula*, *Ranunculus flammula*, *Carex viridula* and some *Sphagnum* around the edge.
8. Bulldozed area of bare ground with Japanese Knotweed invading strongly. (Further areas of gorse were planned to be cleared by the owner soon after 1995 survey visits). By 2005, Knotweed was much reduced; some Rhododendron regenerating from stumps; bare patches present.
9. Rough rushy pasture.
10. Bare ground bonfire site. In 2005, pasture with *Juncus effusus* in low-lying areas.
11. Deeply incised narrow drain and ‘earthwork’ with scrub. By 2005, was fenced off from the field.
12. Complex mosaic of dry unimproved grassland, damp grassland and pools. Pools support a variety of vegetation including *Typha* (especially at NE end), *Eleocharis*, *J. bulbosus* and other rushes, *Peplis portula*, *Ranunculus flammula* and *R. hederaceus* and various sedges. There is much open water in these very shallow pools (2-10 cm deep) amongst the vegetation. The whole area is wettest at the NE end. This appeared to be by far the best area for Odonata at the time of the 1995 survey. pH: 7.8 (19/4/93). In 2005, much drier, *Typha* not vigorous.
13. A tiny area of damp grassland with *Typha*, fenced off from the rest.
14. Species rich wet ‘rush pasture’ now heavily scrubbing up with young willows, birch and other trees. Becoming drier to the south-west. In 2005, scrub with some open areas; dried up shallow puddles present.
15. Runnels/linear pools along old track, with rush pasture along its short wet length. Drier in 2005, though damp and shaded by scrub.

16. 2005: trickle under concrete slab.
17. Fairly fast flowing outlet runnel. Well vegetated. pH: 7.5 (19/4/93). Pond fringed by young trees and *J. effusus*, with similar island. Fairly choked with *Potamogeton*, *J. bulbosus*, blanketweed (*Enteromorpha*) and *Sphagnum* round the edges. Owners periodically clear out some of this weed to maintain open water. pH 5.5. Conductivity 40 µS/cm. 2005: enlarged c2002 and island removed; >60cm deep; surrounded by willow and birch, but not over-shaded; c50% cover of *Juncus bulbosus*, plus *Lythrum portula*, occasional *Nymphaea alba*, *R. flammula*, *Alisma*, *Galium palustre* etc.; occasional *Sphagnum* in margins; owner rakes out weed onto bank to maintain open water.
18. Dry area of grassland becoming scrubbed over, plus mown grass area by cottage. In 2005: grass/garden.
19. Outside area of survey - the short length of track between Burn Cottage and the West Blackdown Site is degraded sheep-grazed pasture. No wet areas apparent at time of 1995 survey.

In 2005, the Station part of the site had been fenced into paddocks and grazed by 2 horses. (and a few sheep in 2008). The reservoir had exposed mud and runnels, water level c1.3m below maximum; inlet still flowing; *Potamogeton* sp., *Glyceria fluitans* and *Sphagnum* in one corner.

Status Part SSSI.	Area 5.5 ha
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Local Authority: Dartmoor NPA/West Devon BC

Owner/tenant (in 2005)

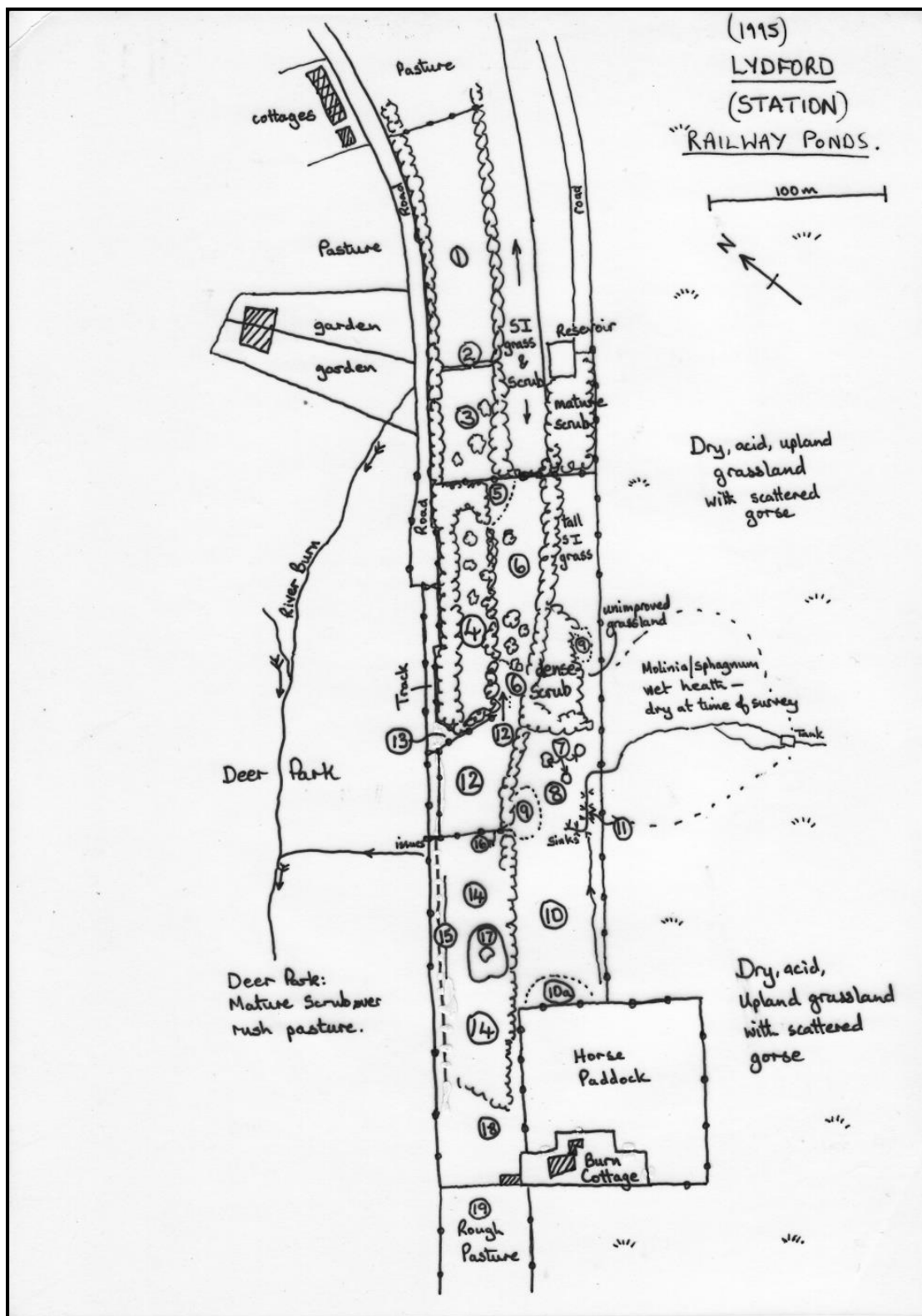
Areas 1-13: Barry Pollack & Fiona McMahon; areas 14 to 18: Sheila Downs.

Threats

- Natural succession and desiccation of watercourses.
- Scrub invasion.
- Japanese Knotweed and some Rhododendron invasion.

Management suggestions

- Continue to control scrub.
- Continue to control Japanese Knotweed.
- Dig some new runnels and pools, on rotation, to replace those in later stages of succession, perhaps starting at the recently-bulldozed areas.



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